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Water Pollution and its Effects

Water pollution occurs when untreated pollutants either directly or indirectly enter any body of water. There are numerous pollutants that enter the earth’s water bodies all over the world including dangerous chemicals and litter (Rubin). Locally, the Gulf Coast experienced a devastating oil spill polluting the Gulf of Mexico (“Gulf Disaster”). Dangerous chemicals and litter come from various sources and have devastating effects on the environment and the health and safety of people and animals (David).

 Dangerous chemicals pollute our water either directly or indirectly and can have deadly consequences. Factories and industries are a direct source. They have waste or by-products from their production and although heavily regulated, some chemicals are illegally dumped or accidentally enter urban water supplies. Water pollution occurs indirectly when rain water carries chemicals and pollutants such as animal waste, fertilizers, soaps, and heavy metals from the soil into lakes and streams (Rubin). The most devastating effect of these pollutants is that they kill the animals that live in or near these water ecosystems and affect the food chain. Fish, birds, and dolphins have washed up dead on beaches. Tiny organisms ingest poisons such as lead and cadmium and are later eaten by a larger organism or fish and the contamination carries all the way up the food chain to humans (David). We can prevent this devastation by performing precautions such as picking up the wastes from our animals and washing our cars in the grass or on a graveled area (“Water Pollution Facts”).

Litter is another pollutant that mainly enters bodies of water indirectly.  Trash, debris, grass clippings and leaves are some of the litter found to pollute the waters (“Water Pollution Facts”). Along the Mobile Bayway, copious amounts of litter enter our waters due to the carelessness of civilians. This litter can harm or suffocate birds, fish and other aquatic life. Too much trash can limit visibility for fish, hindering their ability to find food and take care of their young. Animals in the water can be poisoned by toxins from garbage as well. For example, the glues and paints used in wrappers and boxes end up in the water, causing harm to aquatic life. Too much litter in the waters can also lead to oxygen depletion. When oxygen is depleted, there is not enough oxygen in the water for the aquatic life to thrive (“The Effects of Pollution”). Litter in the waters leads to the disruption of many aquatic ecosystems. To avoid this disruption, we can dispose of our trash properly into garbage bins or preferably recycling bins. Volunteering to pick up garbage along densely populated areas is another great way to prevent litter from harming our ecosystems.

The 2010 BP oil spill is a local example of water pollution that had devastating consequences. When the oil drilling rig located in the Gulf of Mexico exploded, millions of gallons of crude oil spewed from the ocean floor making this event the worst oil disaster in American history. The oil sheen spread across thousands of square miles and not only reached the Alabama shores but also the coastlines of Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana. Within the ocean, thousands of animals and ecosystems were affected including plankton, dolphins and numerous species of fish. As giant tar balls continuously washed ashore, the coastline ecosystems were affected. Sea turtle eggs and birds nest were found to be coated with oil. The oil soaked into the eggs, harming and often killing the creatures. This oil spill caused our waters to become more toxic, injuring thousands of defenseless species (“Gulf Disaster”).

Water pollution, whether the source is direct or indirect, inarguably has a destructive effect on the environment and all people and animals. Chemicals, litter and local disasters will always pose a threat, but through strict regulations, volunteer work, and education, we can make a difference in the state of our waters.

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